The Qualities of a Muslim Commander

All Praise is for Allâh Almighty. May He Shower Peace and Blessings on His Prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ) and his Companions.

The qualities and excellence essential for a Muslim general in the field of warfare are listed below -

1. True, constant and firm Faith.
2. Dignified personality.
3. Valorous and courageous.
4. Steadfast and resolute of purpose.
5. Strength of will and ability to execute.
6. Charismatic and magnetic personality.
7. Eloquent.
8. Well-equipped.
9. Generosity and liberality.
10. A sense of justice and fair play.

Let us go a little deeper into the meaning, significance and importance of these qualities:

1. True, constant and firm Faith

It is essential for a military man to have true and firm Faith in order to lead in the political and missionary spheres. A strong, firm and solid faith leaves a lasting and deep influence on the personality. This is a

basic virtue that empowers the heart with courage, valour and a total lack of fear and ambition. Whether the army faces victory and glory or obstacles and defeat, intelligence and wisdom are never thrown off balance. In the battlefield whether faced with glorious triumph or humiliating defeat, only that army adopts a balanced viewpoint and mode of operation, which has the right faith and the right perspective. It has often been seen in martial history that a victorious army and its general lose all sense of proportion and display a total loss of sense of proportion. It is intoxicated with it success and goes berserk. Civilians are killed, women are raped and human dignity is insulted and betrayed. The social system of the conquered territory is turned upside down, and social and moral values are eroded and destroyed. But the Muslim generals regard victory with modesty and humility as a blessing and gift of Allâh Almighty. This attitude is solely due to trust, faith and a right sense of values.

When the Prophet ﷺ entered Makkah triumphantly after conquering it, his head was bowed low down on the hump of his horse in gratitude to Allâh Almighty, His Creator. He declared universal amnesty for all the people of Makkah. Similarly, a successful general who in war faces obstacles, problems and adverse conditions, instead of losing heart, turns and moves closer to Allâh ﷻ. He faces all difficulties with courage and bravery. This competence and ability is born of confident reliance on, and perfect and absolute trust in Allâh Almighty.

This is the reason why the Prophet ﷺ, instead of losing hope in the disaster of the battle of Uhud, led his injured *Mujâhideen* right up to Hamra' Al-Asad in hot pursuit of the Quraish without giving them an opportunity to turn around and enter Al-Madinah to celebrate their success. This shows that if the leading general is courageous and ambitious, he can recoup his losses and turn defeat into victory. Misfortunes and defeats fail to overcome his high spirits and, ultimately it is this high morale which lifts up the sagging spirits of his soldiers and leads them to triumph.

One day the Commander-in-Chief of the Muslims, Messenger of Allâh ﷺ, was lying down in the shade of the Ka'bah, resting. One of his most loyal Companion Khabbab bin Aratt, who had suffered deeply from

the *Kuffar*, asked him when Allâh Almighty would help them; the suffering and cruelty had reached its utmost limits. The Prophet ﷺ sat up and said:

> "O Khabbab, Are you giving up so easily with just these little problems? Our predecessors who spoke up for the Truth and worshipped the Truth had suffered much more than us. Saws were used to tear them apart, and combs made of iron were used to rake their flesh, but they remained stubbornly adherent to the Truth. The greatest torture and tyranny failed to make them recant or retract an inch from their positions. O Khabbab, be patient and very soon you will see for yourself the gentle and halcyon days of peace everywhere. The land of Arab will become the cradle of loving and serene brotherhood. From San'a' to Hader Al-Moat wayfarers will be able to travel in peace, with no fear of danger."

Calamities, misfortunes and problems have to be faced with patience and fortitude because they prove to be the forerunners of victory and success. And how does one inculcate these qualities? They are born of a deep and abiding faith in Allâh Almighty; many a time, because of these qualities, events which bewilder man's powers of reason and logic occur in the battlefield. One of the greatest generals in the history of Islam, Khâlid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه, right in front of the enemy fearlessly and boldly drank up a bottle of deadly poison. This lethal dose of poison did him no harm! This was because he had absolute faith that Allâh Almighty could negate the effect of the poison. The enemy was simply astounded!

Another great general, Sa'd bin Abu Waqâs رضي الله عنه, led his horse into the deep waters of the River Dajlah, and crossed over, safe and sound to the other side to the utter amazement of the enemy Persian army which was standing there. He thus proved that if Allâh Almighty is the Helper, then nothing can harm or injure people who have pure and absolute faith in Him.

After the resounding victory in the battle of Yarmook, the great General Khâlid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه received a letter dismissing him from service. Very calmly he said:

> "I did not fight in the battlefield for *Amir-ul-Mo'mineen* 'Umar bin Khattâb ؓ; I fought to bring glory to Allâh and Islam. I can continue to perform my duty even as an ordinary soldier. Therefore I do not regret receiving a letter of dismissal."

Such an attitude can only be the result of the deep faith and a righteous viewpoint.

2. Dignified personality

In order to fulfill one's duties in the army military leaders are made to pass through certain stages in the course of their training. Special care is taken to see that they are trained according to a certain manner. This is in order to cultivate an imposing and dignified personality. The army has to have discipline and a sense of order. Therefore men who have to fulfill the duties of military leadership have to possess an impressive personality. This imposing dignity and a certain aura of majesty impresses and overawes the onlooker; and feelings of love, respect and reverence take root in his heart. This blessed quality of dignity is a gift of Allâh Almighty. It can become part of one's personality only if there is true Faith, fear of Allâh Almighty, integrity, and an effort to guard moral and ethical values.

Not one person had the courage to look the Prophet ﷺ in the eye. When he spoke the effect was almost as if the persons addressed had been mesmerized and could not move. There is no parallel in human history of a person evoking such a response. He was respected, revered and inspired awe and love. Amirul-Mo'mineen 'Umar Farooq ؓ had such a dignified bearing and was so awe-inspiring that people felt nervous to speak to him. Some of the companions told 'Abdur-Rahmân bin 'Auf ؓ that they felt scared to talk to the Amirul-Mo'mineen, and that he should adopt a softer attitude. When he came to know of this, he offered this supplication to Allâh ﷻ:

> "O Allâh Almighty increase my dignity day by day, so that I may be better able to spread Your true Message."

There are examples in society where a man may appear very strong, but unfortunately lacks a dignified personal presence. Thus he has absolutely no value or merit in the affections of people. It is essential for

a Muslim general to have a very dignified and awe-inspiring personality; otherwise he cannot discharge his duties and responsibilities of leadership to perfection, or even to near-perfection. The Prophet ﷺ had said:

> "I have been granted such majesty and dignity that the enemy who is a month away from me (in terms of travelling distance) starts to tremble when he hears my name."

3. Valour and Courage

Only that person can fulfill the responsibilities of a leader in the battlefield who is the personification of bravery, valour, daring and fearlessness. When the conditions in war are extremely unfavourable only a daring and fearless man can overcome and control them. 'Ali ؓ says that whenever matters took a critical turn in a battle they used to look at the bold and confident attitude of the Prophet ﷺ and gain courage. Whenever the fighting was at its most intense he would display extraordinary daring and nerve and move as close as possible to the enemy and try to overwhelm him. All his *Mujâhideen* would then gain courage and aspire to follow his example.

When Khâlid bin Waleed ؓ went into the battlefield to face the Roman General, he realized that his steed was weaker in comparison with the enemy. The Roman of course wanted to take the fullest possible advantage of the situation. Khâlid bin Waleed ؓ guessed his intentions and made a very daring counter move. He leapt down from his horse and struck a powerful blow with his sword at the leg of the Roman's horse. Its leg broke and he fell to the ground; his rider too fell at the feet of Khâlid bin Waleed ؓ, who in a flash cut off his neck. Having got rid of his enemy he calmly sat down and had his meal right there!

4. Steadfast and resolute of purpose

In the arena of war the ordinary soldier in the army keeps up his morale and is bold as long as his Commander displays a steadfast and resolute attitude. As soon as the general shows hesitation or indecisiveness, the army too begins to falter. When the enemy exerts intense pressure it is the primary and most important duty of the

Commander too not only built up, but to keep up the morale of his men. And only that General can fulfill this duty to the best degree who, is consistently resolute, steadfast, intrepid and brave. During the battle of Hunnain when the army was falling apart due to the pressure being exerted by the enemy the Prophet ﷺ stood firm in the battlefield and with great fervour said:

> "I am the True Prophet, it is no lie, and I am the son of 'Abdul Mutallib!"

Seeing the resolute stand taken by him, the army which was scattering in fear rallied round him. Thus it is seen that whenever a crisis occurs in battle and the army faces a difficult situation, the commander should display confidence and steadfastness. This is the only way to win lost causes. This is the primary and essential military responsibility of a general.

The Qur'ân gives a golden principle about how to inculcate and develop this invaluable quality of steadfastness and resoluteness. Allâh Almighty says:

> "O you who believe! If you will help (in the cause of) Allâh, He will help you, and make your foothold firm." (47:7)

In order to attain and achieve this great quality one must be prepared to sacrifice one's life and possessions to propagate and promote the religion of Allâh Almighty. Whosoever helps to spread the religion of Allâh Almighty, he will find Him to be his Supporter and Protector. And if Allâh Almighty gives him His Support and Protection then he is assured success now and in the Hereafter. Steadfastness is the stepping stone to real success as the Noble Qur'ân has instructed. The Noble Qur'ân says:

> "O you who believe! When you meet (an enemy) take a firm stand against them and remember the Name of Allâh much (both with tongue and mind), so that you may be successful." (8:45)

In this *Âyah* of the Noble Qur'ân the glad tidings have been given that when opposing the enemy firmness and determination should be displayed and Allâh Almighty should be remembered and appealed

to fervently at all times. This multiplies the chances of success. Firmness of purpose and remembrance of Allâh ﷻ are very important for a Muslim commander.

5. Strength of will and ability to execute

Any successful general has to have a strong will and be competent and efficient enough to have his orders executed. If he does not have this ability he will not be able to do justice to his plan.

A determined general will be resolute and firm in making a decision and also in implementing it boldly and courageously. If a leader is irresolute then he will not be able to deal with or control the changing conditions in the battlefield. There are many such examples in life where a person practices abstinence, has great faith in and fear of Allâh Almighty, but lacks self-confidence, will power and the element of firmness in the actual execution of a well thought out strategy. In other words, theoretical planning by itself is of no use unless there is practical application. A leader must have the ability to plan the strength of will to decide firmly, and then to execute the plan. A person who does not have all these three qualities cannot be a successful leader in any sphere - social, political or military.

This is why the Prophet ﷺ instructed Abu Zar Al-Ghaffari رضي الله عنه, a weak willed person that he should never take on the responsibility of leading even two people. The onus would fall on him for any errors of omission or commission on the Day of Judgment, and humiliation, dishonour and repentance would be his fate. On the other hand, the Prophet ﷺ appointed the young seventeen year old 'Usâmah bin Zaid رضي الله عنه the Commander of an army which included such noteworthy, experienced and respected Companions such as Abu Bakr Siddiq and 'Umar Farooq رضي الله عنهما.

Courage and ambition take life from determination and a strong will; for success in a daring and dangerous enterprise this characteristic is indispensable. It is again from this trait of character that a fortified and firm faith is born. It is this element that gives continuity and a logical follow up to action. Allâh says:

"Then, when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allâh,

certainly, Allâh loves those who put their trust (in Him)." (3:159)

Brave people always practice in every field; with firm and determined action they perform incredible and remarkable deeds. Lack of sturdy resolve makes a person act according to momentary whims and caprices, and he cannot by any means carry out the onerous responsibilities of a successful leader. Thus it is essential for a military commander or a general that strength of will be very much part and parcel of his temperament.

6. Charismatic and magnetic personality

All the qualities mentioned above pertain to the character and capabilities of the ideal commander and not to his physical appearance. But when a leader is selected it should be borne in mind that his physical attributes also have an effect on the development of his personality as a whole; besides they also affect the beholder as well as his subordinates.

In social interaction smartness in dress, good manners and a certain elegance of style play a very positive role in winning over people. In this context if one studies the personal habits of the Prophet ﷺ one sees how particular he was as regards personal hygiene, neatness and cleanliness. People would realize he had passed by a street because he left an aura of perfume behind him. Whenever he met delegations he would make it a point to dress well. Besides being cultured and well mannered a leader also has to have a fine physique. The Noble Qur'ân says:

> "And their Prophet (Samuel عليه السلام) said to them, 'Indeed Allâh has appointed Tâlût (Saul) as a king over you.' They said, 'How can he be a king over us when we are fitter than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth.' He said: 'Verily, Allâh has chosen him above you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allâh grants His kingdom to whom He wills. And Allâh is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower." (2:247)

Talut was a handsome tall youth from among the Bani Israeel who

was chosen to be their king, and his good looks and his physique were considered to be one of the basic qualifications for a ruler. For leadership in the military besides a person's intellectual prowess, his physical fitness and looks should also be taken into account.

7. Eloquence

Eloquence and oratorical skills can be used to great effect to rouse emotions and feelings. To inculcate courage, to arouse ambitions and to rouse the fervour of the *Mujâhideen* to grievously wound the enemy (for all these purposes) eloquence can be used to great effect. A skillful orator through his eloquence can change the course of things, and can turn a peaceful environment into a flaming volcano. An army commander with his eloquence can inflame his men with a burning desire to go to *Jihâd*, and thus easily gain supremacy over the enemy. A trait shared by all notable generals in military history has been eloquence. A successful general before entering the battle arena always give a fiery and emotionally charged speech to his army, arousing the ardent desire for *Jihâd*, and this makes it that much easier for the men to gain victory. An appropriate and timely extempore and passionate address can have a magical effect on the men. In military schools the officers who are chosen to command are specially educated and trained in the skills of oratory, so that they can use this skill when the need arises. Every general must possess this ability.

8. Excellent arms

Every age in the history of mankind has acknowledged the vital importance and necessity for having the best available arms to equip their forces. The Prophet ﷺ said:

"Verily, the strength is in archery."

This statement is valid even today in this technologically advanced age. Whichever country has the strongest arms and arsenal has supremacy over its opponent. It should be the strongest available and well organized. And for modern arms too the same skill of *Rammi* is essential. Whether it may be the napalm bomb, the hydrogen bomb or the atom bomb - all arms need to be deployed and aimed, which is the skill of *Rammi* that the Prophet ﷺ spoke about.

Intelligent and alert nations, who wish to subjugate the enemy, Should always be well equipped, well prepared and well organized.

Military preparedness and the equipping of oneself with the best possible arsenal for the purpose of inspiring awe and dread in the enemy. In the modern age when there are displays and parades of military equipment on national days and so on, one underlying purpose is to impress and warn the enemy, as it were. And if the enemy is really planning to attack, then he will be forewarned of the possible dangers and repercussions.

The Noble Qur'ân goes into this concept in very great detail. As Allâh Almighty says:

> "And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery) to threaten the enemy of Allâh and your enemy, and others besides whom, you may not know but whom Allâh does know. And whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allâh shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly." (8:60)

Gaining power and strength through the acquiring of war equipment and arsenals helps to impress the enemy and cow him down. The commander, in order to do justice to his position should have full knowledge regarding all kinds of equipment and have wide ranging experience regarding the use of it as well.

9. Generosity and liberality

A head of any department or establishment should be a liberal, beneficent and just person; this leads to many good results. A liberal person is universally loved and respected, and this helps him to perform his duties of leadership more easily and better. Prophet ﷺ said:

> "A generous and munificent person is closer to Allâh Almighty, people and *Paradise* (Paradise)."

Philanthropy and generosity adds great dignity to personalities.

The Prophet ﷺ was extremely generous; often he would fill up the purses of the needy to such an extent that prosperity and well being

became theirs for life. It is but a fact of human nature that a generous person who benefits others is more loved and respected by others. When a general behaves with compassion, generosity and kindness with all his subordinates in the army, then it is only natural that they will love him and obey him. They will think it to be an honour to obey his every wish. Leadership and generosity are very closely bound to each other. A stingy and miserly leader will always face shame and embarrassment, and any order given by him will be obeyed with great reluctance. His men will resent him. It has often been seen that harsh, mean and miserly leader will be dispatched by his own subordinates! During the training of generals the elements of compassion, generosity and kindness should be inculcated and the advantages resulting therefrom pointed out to them. They should be able to take full advantage of this great quality in practical life and play a prominent role in the battlefield and in their military life.

10. A sense of justice and fair play

Every human being should have beautiful this life stile. If all human beings behaved in a just and fair manner, society would be transformed and peace and tranquillity would prevail. Especially the head of any institution should compulsorily conduct all affairs under his administration with justice. If he is unfair he will arouse great resentment and hatred. And this will affect his practical life. The Noble Qur'ân enjoins this:

"Be just: that is nearer to piety." (5:8)

Justice, impartiality, abstinence and fear of Allâh ﷻ are qualities which add radiance to personal magnetism. These are some basic characteristics which should be an essential part of the mental and physical make-up of any general. If the army training centers pay attention to the inculcation and development of these qualities the Muslim nations will be able to produce great and efficient soldiers of Allâh Almighty.

May Allâh Almighty Shower His Blessings on the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his Companions!